

[W. B. Dunlap]

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Beliefs and customs - Occupational lore

Range-lore

Annie McAulay

Maverick, Texas

FEC

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RANGE-LORE

W. B. Dunlap of Ballinger, Texas, tells his cowboy experiences as follows:

"My first job was with a Mr. Hensley in Callahan County. That was where I got my first experience in riding the range and handling cattle, and I liked it so well I kept at it.

"I got the roaming fever in 1882 and went up to Four Lakes and got a job on the LFD ranch, where I worked for two years. I had some real experiences there too. The LFD was a big outfit. In 1883 we drove 5400 steers in one drive, to a rancher on the Texas Plains near where the town of Littlefield is now located, and we hardly touched the big herd. There were two wagon outfits and forty-five men with the drive. C 12 - 2/11/41 Tex. [?]
2 We followed the Pecos sandhill route and as it was in the month of April we had some terrible sandstorms on our way, which made traveling very disagreeable and slowed us down some. Of course the steers had to be watched closer in all that cloud of dust. But one good thing about that drive, we didn't have any wire fences to bother us.

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"I always preferred the side of a hill for bedding down the cattle because if something disturbs those above, they jump up without those below being aware of it, and vice versa; but if they are bedded down on level ground and some part of the herd becomes disturbed, the whole business will get up before you hardly know it, make a break and begin to run. And once they start, it's some job to stop them. About all you can do is try to get them to circling, then keep them milling until they're played out.

"After I left this outfit I went to work for the Champion Cattle Company in Mitchell County. I worked on the CA= ranch, a very big outfit. One hundred men were employed and there were one thousand saddle horses for the ranch work. Every fellow had to be a good rider, able to ride whatever bronc he was told to ride, and I have seen as many as eight empty saddles in one morning.

"One spring an old boy came to Colorado City, looking for a cowpunching job. He wore button shoes, derby 3 hat, and a scissors-tail coat- distinctly the dude type found in the East. We didn't know where he hailed from but when our boss hired him we thought we'd sure have a barrel of fun out of him. They cut him out a mount of saddle horses and the first one he selected to ride was a little dun pony with a wicked eye, which he evidently didn't notice. He got on him and almost immediately came in contact with the floor of the corral. That bronc pitched him off three times but the fourth time he stuck, and he got to where he wasn't afraid of any horse. He made a crackerjack cowhand.

"We razzed the green hands something terrible. We reveled in making them look ridiculous. They were always put on the toughest broncs and given the dirtiest jobs. One of the favorite methods of initiation was leggin' them. We'd turn them across something and then take off our chaps (we called them leggin's) and put it on them until they hollered 'Enough.' We got pretty rough sometimes but you had to initiate a fellow, proper, or he wasn't any account. Then he "belonged". He was one of the boys after that.

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"I helped with one big spring round-up where there were about fifteen or twenty thousand head of cattle. It was at Dove Creek Springs. During the winter months the cattle had been allowed to drift and herds from different outfits had become mixed. All the ranch outfits in that part of the country helped in the round-up. Each outfit had a boss and these bosses selected a general boss for the whole crew. The cattle had drifted down on the Concho Rivers, and some had gone as far as Devils River, so the riders were sent out in all directions and they brought the cattle together at Dove Creek. They were so thirsty and there were so many of them, the boss told us to let them go to water first; then they drifted out into the draws to graze and we'd work about one of these draws a day, each outfit cutting out their brand and holding them. It took us about ten days to get them separated.

"There was a right smart of trouble in this section during the wire cutting days. The open range cowmen resented fence building, because it shut them off from their free range. In 1884 during a big roundup over north of Wingate in Nolan County, when the boys came to a fence they'd just cut the wire and go right on. Well, of course this caused a clash between the range men and the "setters" or "squatters" as they were called. The Texas Rangers were sent out to settle the trouble and after making several arrests they put a stop to the fence cutting. But the strife between the open range men and the "small men" continued for some time. It was against the law at that time to carry arms, but all the boys in that round-up were armed. One old boy had a pretty white handled six-shooter he set a heap of store by, and when he learned that the rangers were coming he stuck it in a prairie dog hole, the best hiding place he could think of. Later, when he went back to get his gun it could not be located. It had either slipped down so far in the hole that he couldn't see it or he had mistaken the hole. He never did find that gun and he sure did grieve about it. I guess if that prairie dog hole hasn't been moved, the gun is still buried in it." Range-lore

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

W. B. Dunlap, Ballinger, Texas, interviewed, February 8, 1938.